

Message Text

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SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN EARTHQUAKE: SECRETARY'S WISH TO COMMEND
OFFICERS IN EMBASSY GUATEMALA

1. WHEN THE SECRETARY WAS IN GUATEMALA FEBRUARY 24 HE ASKED THAT THE NAMES OF THE THREE OFFICERS IN THE U.S. MISSION WHO HAD PERFORMED WITH SUCH OUTSTANDING ABILITY AND DISTINCTION DURING THE EARTHQUAKE RELIEF EMERGENCY, AND WHOM HE MET HERE, BE SENT TO HIM SO THAT HE MIGHT WRITE LETTERS OF COMMENDATION ON EACH OF THEM. THE NAMES OF THE THREE OFFICERS FOLLOW WITH A BRIEF RESUME OF THE ACTIVITIES OF EACH.

2. DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION GEORGE R. ANDREWS WAS CHARGE D'AFFAIRS WHEN THE DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE STRUCK GUATEMALA AT THREE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING ON FEBRUARY 4, 1976. IN A MATTER OF MINUTES, MR. ANDREWS MADE HIS WAY THROUGH A DARK AND TERRORIZED CITY TO THE AMBASSY CHANCERY, WITH THE AID OF AN EMERGENCY FLASHLIGHT FOUND A TELEPHONE THAT WAS STILL OPERATING AND MADE HIS FIRST REPORT OF THE DISASTER TO THE OPERATIONS CENTER IN THE DEPARTMENT. AT THE SAME TIME HE MOBILIZED THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE STAFF WHO ALSO REACHED THE EMBASSY INTO TEAMS TO VISIT BY CAR THE HOMZH OF ALL MISSION MEMBERS TO VERIFY THEIR WHEREABOUTS AND WELFARE AND TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE AS NEEDED. THROUGH THE HOURS OF THE DAY UNTIL LATE AFTERNOON WHEN THE AMBASSADOR RETURNED FROM WASHINGTON, MR. ANDREWS GAVE SURE, DECISIVE, RESOURCEFUL AND AUTHORITATIVE DIRECTION TO THE MISSION, RECEIVING URGENT REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC AND FROM THE MINISTER

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OF DEFENSE AND ORGANIZING AND SETTING INTO MOTION THE FIRST U.S.

DISASTER RELIEF RESPONSE. THROUGHOUT THE WEEKS THAT FOLLOWED, MR. ANDREWS HAS WORKED WITH PRODIGIOUS INDUSTRY AND SELFLESS DEDICATION IN THE ORGANIZATION AND COORDINATION OF THE U.S. RELIEF EFFORT AND HAS SHARED AND PARTICIPATED IN POLICY DECISIONS REGARDING ITS DIRECTION. HE HAS KEPT A MULTITUDE OF DETAILS AT HIS FINGERTIPS AND YET HAS MAINTAINED A BALANCED OVERALL LONG-RANGE PERSPECTIVE. HE HAS DEVOTED COUNTLESS HOURS TO GUIDING, COUNSELING AND DIRECTING THE DAILY ACTIVITIES OF AN EMBASSY IN CRISIS WHICH WAS BENDING ITS EVERY RESOURCE TO THE DISASTER RELIEF OPERATIONS AND YET WAS BEING MINDFUL OF THE DISTRESS AND NEEDS OF ITS OWN PERSONNEL, BOTH GUATEMALAN AND AMERICAN. AS THE SURE RIGHT HAND AND ALTER EGO OF THE CHIEF OF MISSION HIS JUDGEMENT WAS SUPERLATIVE, HIS ADVISE WISE, APPROPRIATE AND INDISPENSABLE AND HIS PERFORMANCE IN THE HIGHEST TRADITION OF THE FOREIGN SERVICE.

3. AS MISSION DISASTER RELIEF COORDINATOR, AID DIRECTOR EDWARD W. COY HAS PLAYED THE KEY ROLE IN THE U.S. RELIEF EFFORT IN GUATEMALA FOLLOWING THE DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE OF FEBRUARY 4, 1976 WHICH LEFT 23,000 DEAD, 76,000 INJURED, AND 1.5 MILLION HOMELESS. HE HAS FURNISHED WISE, SURE, SOUND AND TIMELY ADVISE TO THE AMBASSADOR CONCERNING PRIORITIES AND POLICIES. UNDER ONLY BROAD GENERAL GUIDANCE, HE HAS EXERCISED AN EXTREMELY WIDE DEGREE OF INDEPENDENT JUDGEMENT AND DECISION WITH OUTSTANDING SKILL AND SUCCESS. IN NEGOTIATING WITH A DUSRUPTED GUATEMALAN BUREAUCRACY, AND COORDINATING OFFICIAL US RELIEF WITH THE MANY PRIVATE VOLUNTARY AGENCIES, AND WITH THE PEACE CORPS, MR. COY HAS OPERATED WITH THE GREATEST RESOURCEFULNESS, TACT AND DECISIVENESS. ONE POTENTIALLY SERIOUS PROBLEM HAS BEEN THAT GUATEMALA MIGHT BE FLOODED WITH UNNECESSARY RELIEF SUPPLIES, WHILE CRITICALLY NEEDED ITEMS REMAINED IN SHORT SUPPLY, A SITUATION FRAUGHT WITH PUBLIC RELATIONS AND POLITICAL RISKS. MR. COY HAS BEEN SUPERB IN HANDLING THIS AND MANY OTHER SENSITIVE MATTERS AND IN DIRECTING OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE AID TO THE NEEDIEST AREAS. HE SET UP A US MISSION DISASTER RELIEF CENTER AT THE AIRPORT TO COORDINATE WITH THE US MILITARY GROUP ALSO OPERATING THERE AND TO PROVIDE FOR RAPID RECEPTION, HANDLING AND DISTRIBUTION OF US SUPPLIES -- AS OF FEBRUARY 24 THERE HAD BEEN 95 NON-MILITARY FLIGHTS WITH 1,766 TONS OF CARGO AND 71 US MILITARY FLIGHTS WITH 740 TONS OF CARGO. UNDER GREAT STRESS,, UNCLASSIFIED

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MR. COY HAS HANDLED A BROAD RANGE OF DIFFICULT OPERATIONAL AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS WITH A SURE HAND AND KEEN INSIGHT. HIS JUDGEMENT HAS BEEN COOL, MEASURED, REALISTIC, AND WISE. HE IS AN OFFICER OF GREAT STRENGTH AND UTTER RELIABILITY, WHO HAS DISCHARGED ENORMOUS RESPONSIBILITIES WITH SIGNAL SUCCESS. HIS PERFORMANCE PES BEEN ABSOLUTELY OUTSTANDING.

4. COLONEL CHARLES D. CORBETT, USA, UNITED STATES MILITARY

GROUP COMMANDER IN GUATEMALA, HAS HAD OPERATIONAL COMMAND
OF ALL U.S. MILITARY FORCES IN GUATEMALA SINCE THE OUTSET OF THE
EARTHQUAKE EMERGENCY AND THE U.S. RELIEF EFFORT ON FEBRUARY 4,
1976. UNDER HIS SKILLFUL AND DECISIVE DIRECTION, THE US MILITARY
HAVE MADE A CRUCIAL CONTRIBUTION IN SAVING COUNTLESS LIVES AND
BRINGING RELIEF TO THOUSANDS OF INDIVIDUALS IN AN AREA OF UTMOST
DEVASTATION WHICH WAS COMPLETELY CUT OFF AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE
OF FEBRUARY 4, THE GREATEST NATURAL CATASTROPHE IN CENTRAL
AMERICA IN RECORDED HISTORY. SIXTEEN US MILITARY PLANES
ARRIVED THE DAY OF THE QUAKE AS DID A SEVEN-MAN US ARMY DISASTER
AREA SURVEY TEAM. IN THE NEXT DAYS EIGHT CHINOOK AND NINE HUEY
HELICOPTERS CAME TO GUATEMALA, AS WELL AS A FULLY MANNED US
ARMY FIELD HOSPITAL. THE HELICOPTERS WERE USED TO GO INTO
ISOLATED AREAS TO BRING IN FOOD, WATER, TENTS AND OTHER URGENTLY
NEEDED SUPPLIES, AND TO MEDICALLY EVACUATE THE SERIOUSLY INJURED.
IN THE FIRST EIGHT DAYS, THE HELICOPTERS CARRIED OUT 1,964 SORTIES
LIFTING MORE THAN 783 TONS OF CARGO AND 4,293 PASSENGERS PLUS
577 MEDICAL EVACUEES. SUBSEQUENTLY, A US ARMY ENGINEER TEAM
MADE A SURVEY OF THE REPAIRS NEEDED TO THE VITAL MAIN HIGHWAY
TO THE ATLANTIC PORTS. ALSO, TWO US ARMY SANITATION ENGINEERS
HELPED TO RESTORE SAFE WATER SUPPLIES AND TO DISTRIBUTE AND SET
UP EIGHTY-FIVE 3,000-GALLON RUBBER WATER TANKS. THE TOTAL
NUMBER OF US MILITARY PERSONNEL IN GUATEMALA PEAKED AT 530
ON FEBRUARY 22. COL. CORBETT'S MANAGEMENT OF THIS EMERGENCY
RELIEF EFFORT WAS SUPERB. HE FURNISHED TIMELY AND WISE ADVICE
TO THE AMBASSADOR AND MAINTAINED CLOSE AND EFFECTIVE COORDINATION
WITH THE MISSION DISASTER RELIEF COORDINATOR. HE ENSURED
EFFICIENT AND SWIFT DISTRIBUTION OF SUPPLIES AND HE DEMONSTRATED
STRONG LEADERSHIP. THROUGHOUT, COL. CORBETT MAINTAINED A SENSE OF
PERSPECTIVE AND PROPORTION. HE WAS IMAGINATIVE, RESOURCEFUL, CALM
AND SURE. HIS HANDLING OF DIFFICULT SITUATIONS WAS TACTFUL, FIRM,
REASONABLE AND EMINENTLY SUCCESSFUL. COL. CORBETT IS AN
OFFICER OF THE HIGHEST CALIBER. HIS SUPERLATIVE PERFORMANCE
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DURING THIS CRISIS PROVIDES STRIKING PROOF OF HIS OUTSTANDING
PROFESSIONAL QUALITIES AND HIS MARKED CAPACITY TO ASSUME MAJOR
AND CRITICAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND TO DISCHARGE THEM WITH
BRILLIANCE AND DISTINCTION.
MELOY

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